

Sharing your story online

The education community on the internet is growing as teachers become bloggers. WAYNE ERB reports

A Nelson teacher thought a dance video would be a creative activity for a class and more fun still if other classes took part to make a collaborative performance. But what if those other classes were not down the hallway but overseas and around New Zealand?

It was a great idea and one the internet made entirely do-able. The teacher in question, Allanah King, wrote about the project on her blog (which was read internationally), 'twittered' about it and got video responses from teachers in Thailand, Canada, England, the United States and all over New Zealand. "Which you wouldn't get if you had a piece of paper on your classroom wall asking who wants to dance," she observes.

That project happened last year when Allanah was an ICT facilitator. She's now back at Appleby School and will continue the professional blog she began two years ago.

She is not alone in the 'blogosphere' – a wide range of New Zealand teachers, from early childhood to secondary level, plus other education professionals maintain blogs. Links and comments proliferate between them all.

Allanah's class also have their own blogs and she has a number of wikis, podcasts, online videos and communication channels that form her "digital footprint".

"It's changed the way I look at teaching and learning. I try to open my classroom to collaboration and learning together with other classes in innovative ways," she says.

Teachers like her are writing blogs to share reflections on practice, pass on the excitement of new tools and expand professional networks.

And the teacher presence in the blogosphere is moving beyond early adopters – the first people to use a new technology – and is gathering



Appleby teacher, and blogger, Allanah King.

momentum, says Sarah Jones, the Ministry of Education's team leader of e-learning research and innovation.

"Blogs weren't designed for education but teachers will pick up on this stuff and poke at it until they find an application for education," says Sarah. And yes, she has a blog too. Called Lunch Box, it is the first official blog by a ministry staffer and she uses it to reach teachers with information that supports their e-learning practice.

Sarah says blogs are suited to the dispositions of many teachers. "In education there's this huge desire to learn and question and push and share. It's probably the most exciting aspect of being in education for me."

She says blogging requires discipline to order your thoughts and write them up for others to read.

The willingness to share professional thoughts online is all part of the move towards deprivatising teacher practice, she says. "It's a big thing for people to talk about their successes and failures publicly."

Read through a good teacher blog and it is evident the writer is doing just that – discussion is often not just around the features of a new teaching resource but how the teacher applied it in their class, and what outcomes there were for students.

That's something Allanah aims for, keeping in mind the need to protect the identity of students. Her blog covers trials of new software through to reflections on 21st century teaching approaches.

Giving and receiving feedback from other teachers around the world gives added value to her work.

"The staff I work with are really quite tech-savvy but getting that blog feedback from other global teachers is great as well."

Through her blog, she has grown connections with other teachers, leading her class to work on projects with children from Wales and the United States. And over the summer holidays, Allanah met many of her international colleagues in person for the first time during an overseas trip.

As she puts it: "Those virtual visits became real ones through a connection that started with a comment to a blog post."

Related weblinks:

Allanah's blog: allanahk.edublogs.org/

Sarah's blog: lunchbox.org.nz/

A comprehensive list of teacher blogs: nzedublogs.wikispaces.com/

Allanah's Class Blog: www.moturoa.blogspot.com

Allanah's advice for creating a blog: bling4yrblog.blogspot.com/

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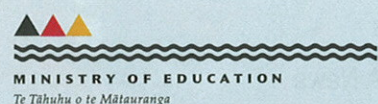


Allanah King explores the internet with students.

Blog beginnings

Hints for getting started from Sarah Jones:

- The first thing is to read and learn from other people's blogs you like.
- Seek advice from other bloggers on how to set up your blog.
- Look around for the best value blogging tool. Some are specifically for education and have privacy settings that may be useful when using blogs with learners. Search for 'blogs' on: <http://softwareforlearning.tki.org.nz/>
- If you're publishing student images or schoolwork on your blog, don't forget to get permission first. These guidelines will help: www.tki.org.nz/r/governance/curriculum/copyguide_e.php
- Take time to comment on other people's blogs – it is part of being a blogger and helps build readership of your blog too.
- To promote your blog, add the URL to your email signature.



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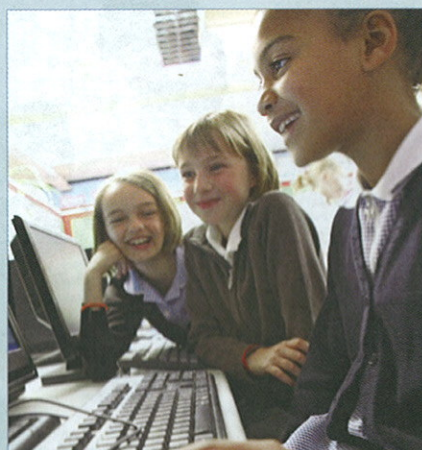
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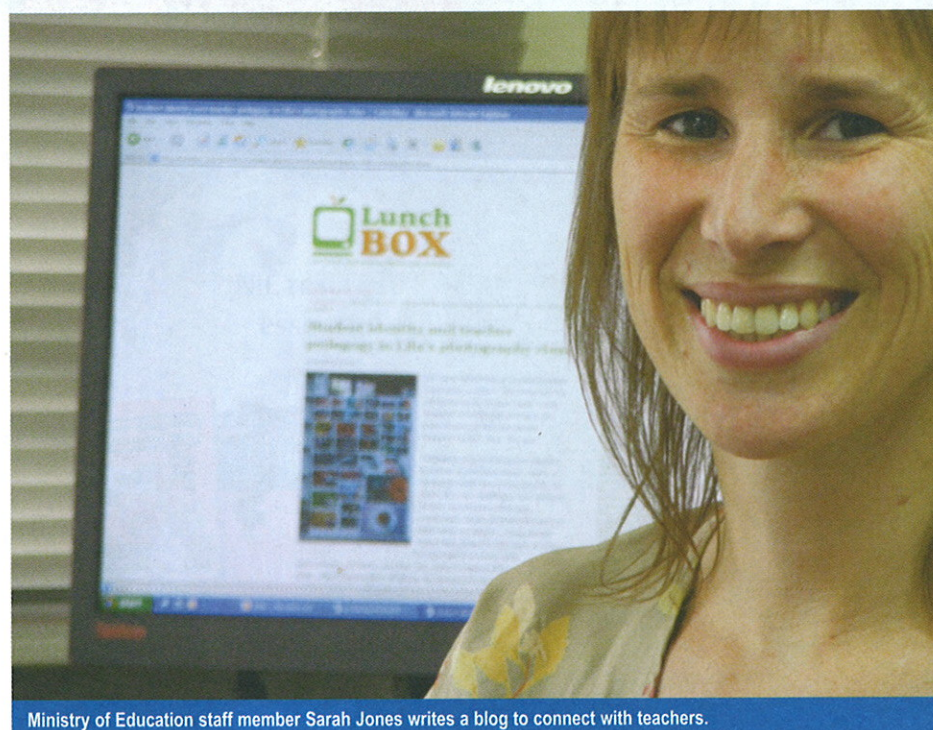
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Cover photo: Many students are savvy users of the internet, and teachers are also keeping up with the rich possibilities it offers for professional communication. Read about teachers who blog in the article this page.



Ministry of Education staff member Sarah Jones writes a blog to connect with teachers.